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ABSTRACT

The 1865 conspiracy to assassinate Abraham Lincoln also included plans to assassinate other government officials on that same April evening. The actor, John Wilkes Booth, succeeded in killing Lincoln, but his fellow conspirators bungled their attempts to kill William Seward, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, and possibly Edwin Stanton. In Washington, DC, Stanton as head of the investigation was unable to stop Booth and his accomplices from escaping into Virginia due to tangled telegraph wires and an inept police force. The questions that arose following Lincoln's assassination included: (1) was Booth the mastermind behind the plot?; (2) were there government officials such as Edwin Stanton in Washington behind Booth?; (3) was the investigation deliberately delayed to permit Booth to escape?; (4) were Jefferson Davis and other confederate officials supporting Booth?; and (5) was the man who was killed on the Richard Garret farm really Booth or someone else? The lack of vital evidence then and now hindered the answers to the questions. This paper was written to be used as a supplement to a textbook's treatment of Lincoln's assassination, and the appendice contains a 25-item assignment list for students to further their study of the event. A 27-item bibliography for the paper is included. (DJC)

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John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracy

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Anna, Ohio

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On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth fired one shot and made Abraham Lincoln a hero, a martyr for the cause of American peace and justice. Booth had the lead role in his last great play. But there were actors, directors, writers, and producers behind the scenes who manipulated properties and directed the main characters. And when Booth decided to "ad lib," those people in the background did their best to secure his success. He predicted that when he left the stage of Ford's Theater, he would be the most famous man in America. Instead, he became the most infamous, in the South as well as the North.

Booth's climactic tragedy was staged in Washington D. C.'s Ford's Theater. The theater was filled with people, some there to see the play, others anxious just to catch a glimpse of the President of the United States. The setting was perfect for Booth as the handsome young actor walked cautiously down the hall leading to President Lincoln's private box. John F. Parker, the Washington policeman whose record of insubordination, unbecoming conduct, and drunkenness on duty (Roscoe, 1959) hardly merited the assignment of guarding the President, was not at his post. Booth had anticipated a guard. He must have breathed a sigh of relief when he noticed that he would confront one less obstacle in achieving his goal.

The President sat, probably thinking more of Lee's surrender on April 9 than of the action on stage. He went to the theater often, not so much to

enjoy the plays as to appease Mrs. Lincoln, who saturated herself in Washington social life. On stage Ava Trenchard, a character from Tom Taylor's Our American Cousins, responded to Mrs. Mountchessington, "Wal, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal -- you sockologizing old mantrap" (Sandburg, 1939). The audience burst into laughter.

As if on cue, Booth rushed swiftly into the Presidential box, barring the door behind him, and fired his derringer point blank at Lincoln's head (Roscoe, 1959). The bullet entered the President's head behind his left ear and lodged just behind his left eye (Laughlin, 1909). The President crumpled into a heap. Major Henry Rathbone, who with his fiance Clara Harris had accompanied the President and Mrs. Lincoln, struggled briefly with Booth and was stabbed several times. Then Booth turned and jumped the eleven feet from the Presidential box to the stage, yelling "sic semper tyrannis! The South is avenged" (Roscoe, 1959). As he jumped, ironically he caught his right spur in the American flag used to decorate the theater boxes. His whole weight fell on his left leg, and "it snapped just above the instep" (Bishop, 1955). Booth did not know it at the time, but his unforseen broken ankle would prevent him from successfully escaping to the South.

The seventeen hundred people in Ford's Theater at first thought the shot was part of the play. They did not know that the President of the United States had just been assassinated.

Mrs. Lincoln screamed.

Rathbone shouted, "Stop that man!" (Laughlin, 1909).

Well-rehearsed, Booth was on stage for only a few seconds, at a time when there were few people or props to block his exit. In the confusion he stumbled across the stage, not yielding to the pain of his broken ankle, ran out the back door, mounted his waiting horse, and escaped (Weik, 1913). The

time was 10:13 p.m. In thirty seconds all was over before anyone's senses fully grasped what had happened. Mrs. Lincoln and Miss Harris had not even moved from their seats (Roscoe, 1959).

As the audience swarmed inside Ford's Theater, Lewis Paine, the twenty-year-old son of a Baptist minister whose only desire in life was to please John Wilkes Booth (Bishop, 1955), was busy with his role in the assassination conspiracy at the home of William Seward, bedridden and in a steel cast following a serious accident (Laughlin, 1909). Paine's job was to assassinate the almost-helpless Secretary of State. He bungled the job.

Most of the Seward household was asleep when Paine knocked at the door and tried to gain admission under the pretense of having medicine for the Secretary of State. When Frederick Seward, the Secretary's son, refused to permit Paine to deliver the medicine to the elder Seward personally, the attacker tried to shoot him. The gun jammed. Paine then brought the butt end of the gun crashing down on Frederick Seward's head, breaking the weapon into pieces (Sandburg, 1939).

Other members of the Seward household had been aroused by the commotion and tried to stop Paine as he slashed at William Seward with a knife. The steel brace tempered the blows and saved the Secretary's life. Frustrated and thwarted, Paine fled screaming, "I'm mad! I'm mad!" He left behind a bloodstained house but not a mortally wounded Secretary of State. Frederick Seward lay in a coma; George Robinson, a nurse, was badly hurt; Augustus Seward was injured but not as seriously; Miss Fanny Seward was unconscious; and William Seward had been severely cut. On his way out, Paine thrust his knife into the chest of a messenger from the State Department who just happened on the scene. He fell without uttering a word (Bishop, 1955).

Another member of Booth's sad band of conspirators, David Herold, "who

was twenty-three, looked seventeen, and had the mentality of a boy of eleven" (Bishop, 1955), was assigned to help Paine escape after he assassinated Seward. Shiftless and irresponsible, and not known for his bravery, Herold fled when he heard the disturbance in Seward's house. When Lewis Paine saw that Herold had run away, he mounted his horse and rode aimlessly through the streets of the Capitol. With no one to guide him, the rather dull-witted Paine was lost (Bishop, 1955).

At this time an angry mob had gathered in front of Ford's Theater. They blamed James Ford for the President's assassination, and they wanted to burn his theater to the ground.

Herold was frightened. He waited as long as he thought prudent. He wanted no part of the mob or conspiracy. He mounted his horse and rode out of the city past the angry crowd toward the Navy Yard Bridge, not realizing that his rented horse was due back at the livery stable. John Fletcher, operator of the stable, saw Herold leaving on his horse and went after him (Bishop, 1955). Renting horses was a costly error for Booth because Fletcher would later tie the conspirators together through his rented horses.

Andrew Johnson was also marked for death on April 14, 1865. Booth felt that Johnson was the least important official to be eliminated and gave the job to George Atzerodt, perhaps the weakest member of the band. Since Johnson was a giant of a man, Atzerodt would have had his hands full. Atzerodt's heart was not in his work, however. The German carriage-maker, a coward and a drunkard, could not find enough courage even in a bottle to carry out his part in the assassination conspiracy (Roscoe, 1959).

Ulysses S. Grant was scheduled to attend the theater with the President and Mrs. Lincoln. At the last minute Grant left Washington by train for New York, partially because Mrs. Grant did not want to socialize with the highly

volatile Mrs. Lincoln (Bishop, 1955). John Surratt, a Confederate secret agent who was to accompany Booth to the theater to kill Lincoln's number one general, changed his plans and followed Grant to New York. Surratt, too, failed. When Grant heard of Lincoln's fate, he returned to the Capitol before the conspirator could accomplish his mission (Roscoe, 1959).

While not confirmed, there were reports that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's life was in jeopardy on that Good Friday in 1865. Indeed, there was probably more reason to kill the ruthless, unscrupulous Stanton than any other leader in Washington. Stanton's cold efficiency was known in both the North and South. Supposedly, an assassin, trying to gain admittance to the Stanton house, rang the doorbell. The doorbell was broken, and no one answered. Several men bringing news of the attack on Seward saw the man "shrink into the shadows at their approach" (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937).

News of the attacks on Lincoln and Seward went to the office of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who worked on the assumption that a conspiracy against high government officials existed. Lincoln's right-hand man sent alarms to Winchester, Harper's Ferry, Cumberland, Baltimore, Annapolis, Acquia Creek, and Relay House, everywhere except between the Potomac and the Patuxant. And that was where Booth was (Bishop, 1955). Stanton had neglected to send patrols to the most obvious escape route to the South.

For eight hours Edwin Stanton was dictator of the United States, ignoring the Constitutional role of Andrew Johnson, who should have assumed power in Washington. He put the government war machine into action, mobilizing eight thousand troops and calling out the city constabulary, Federal detectives, Secret Service agents, and all available guards to set up land and naval blockades, to protect public buildings, and to patrol the streets (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937). But it was almost midnight, one hour and forty-five

minutes after the assassination, before Stanton had all his men notified. Somewhere, somehow, the telegraph wires had become entangled, and no messages could be sent until the lines were uncrossed (Roscoe, 1959).

Soon after, however, Stanton had a dragnet spread across Prince George and Charles counties. The Secretary of War turned the search into a witch hunt. He ordered that everyone in Ford's Theater and even members of Booth's family be arrested ("Jefferson Davis," 1865). In his enthusiasm Stanton filled the jails with hundreds of innocent people. The government acted, then overreacted, to the conspirators' attacks on Lincoln administration officials.

While Stanton and his underlings bumbled into action, Booth and Herold were escaping. At the Navy Yard Bridge Sergeant Silas Cobb stopped Booth. The time was 10:45 p.m. No one was permitted to cross after 9:00 p.m. However, after explaining to Cobb that he did not know of the rule and had hoped to return home by the light of the moon, Booth was allowed to pass. Now that the Civil War was drawing to a close, many of the strict rules made necessary by the conflict were not always followed (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937).

Several minutes later Herold arrived at the bridge. Herold told the guard that he was on his way home after carousing in the Capitol. The sergeant scrutinized the conspirator, then allowed him to pass also (Bishop, 1955).

John Fletcher, the Washington liveryman who was purusing Herold, stopped at the bridge. Cobb questioned Fletcher, and since the man "did not seem to have any business on the other side of the bridge that I considered of sufficient importance to pass him, . . . turned him back" (Wilson, 1929). Fletcher, angry, returned to Washington. Booth and Herold by 11:00 p.m. had successfully escaped from Washington.

Herold caught up with Booth, who by that time had a fever and was in

great pain as a result of the broken ankle he sustained in his jump from the theater box to the stage. He could go no further without medical treatment. The pair stopped at the farm of Dr. Samuel Mudd, whom Booth had met several months earlier. Booth, always the actor, disguised himself in a beard and mustache that he had with him (Roscoe, 1959). Mudd, a Southern sympathizer still unaware of Lincoln's being shot, set Booth's leg, fed him, and permitted him to get some much-needed rest. Had Booth and Herold not been forced to stop at Dr. Mudd's, they would have successfully escaped to the South. But by the time Mudd sent the assassin and his accomplice on their way, the entire area was swarming with soldiers. It was only a matter of time before Booth and Herold would be cornered (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937).

The conspirators originally planned to cross into Virginia at Port Tobacco, but the stop at Dr. Mudd's forced them to make their crossing at Port Conway. The ferryman there told the Union troops pursuing Booth that their prey had slipped into Virginia (Ruggles and Doherty, 1890). The noose was tightening on Booth and Herold.

John Wilkes Booth and David Herold made their way to Colonel Samuel Cox's plantation, trying desperately to escape to the South where they felt they would be accepted with open arms as heroes by their fellow Confederates. Once South, they planned to go to Mexico or Spain which had no extradition treaties with the United States (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937). They hid on Cox's plantation, then started South. However, after leaving Cox's, they became lost in the Virginia marshlands (Wilson, 1929). The precious time lost in getting Booth's leg set and in finding their way out of the labyrinth of the Virginia marshlands resulted in failure to reach the South. It was only a matter of time before the soldiers tightened the noose around the conspirators.

Booth and Herold still had hopes for escape, hopes which were reinforced when they met Captain Willie Jett, an eighteen-year-old Confederate veteran who helped them find a place to hide. He took Booth, whom he introduced as John William Boyd, and Herold to the Richard Garrett farm three miles south of Port Royal, Virginia, and seventy-eight miles from Washington (Wilson, 1929). Jett, at first their savior, would later be the primary instrument in their capture.

In Washington, Police Major A. C. Richards, who had witnessed the assassination of Lincoln, and General Christopher Augur, commander of the armed forces at the Capitol, interrogated several eyewitnesses. John Flectcher, the Washington liveryman who knew about horses, what they looked like, and who rode them, told authorities that he had rented a horse to both Booth and Herold. Additional testimony by Fletcher, combined with reports from other eyewitnesses, gave Richards and Augur three suspects: David Herold, George Atzerodt, and John Wilkes Booth (Bishop, 1955).

Stanton, however, sent no word to apprehend Booth. To the Secretary of War, John Wilkes Booth was "small game" (Bishop, 1955). He claimed that the assassination of Lincoln was only a minor part of a much larger conspiracy formulated by the South ("Stanton Said," 1865). The newspapers labeled Jefferson Davis head of the conspirators and implicated members of the Confederate hierarchy Jacob Thompson, Clement Clary, Beverly Tucker, George N. Sanders, and W. C. Clary ("Jefferson Davis," 1865). Credibility was later added to these reports when Davis fled the Southern capitol on May 2 ("The Assassination, 1865).

Meanwhile, the search for Booth and Herold continued. The search, however, turned into a Keystone Kops chase. With rewards of up to one hundred thousand dollars offered for the capture of the assassins (Sandburg, 1939),

soldiers became bounty hunters, acting as individuals, not units. Efforts were duplicated in some areas while other avenues of escape went unchecked by the inept hunters. At times soldiers were less than a mile from Booth, yet they were all unable to apprehend the assassin and his accomplice for several days following the assassination of Lincoln (Roscoe, 1959).

Booth and Herold successfully eluded the Union troops for twelve days. Finally, on April 26, twenty-eight Union soldiers led by Captain Willie Jett, the ex-Confederate soldier who earlier had helped the fleeing conspirators, rode onto the Garrett farm. They dragged Richard Garrett from his house with a gun to his chest, threatening to hang him if he did not tell them where Booth was. He said nothing. Finally, Jack Garrett, Richard's son, to save his father's life, told the men that Booth was in the tobacco barn (Wilson, 1929).

The soldiers surrounded the barn and ordered the cornered assassins to surrender. There was no answer for several long minutes. Then Herold came out, leaving his guns with Booth who wanted to fight and play the tragic hero to the very last. With orders to take him alive, the men set fire to the barn, hoping to force Booth to surrender peacefully ("President Lincoln," 1865).

"Well, my brave boys," shouted Booth, "prepare me a stretcher and place another stain on our glorious banner" (Ruggles and Doherty, 1890).

Suddenly a shot rang out, and Booth slumped to the ground with a bullet in his neck. Only a single shot was fired. One officer thought Booth had shot himself. Then Sergeant Boston Corbett came forward and claimed credit for shooting Booth, who supposedly was aiming his gun at David Herold or Lieutenant Edward Doherty, commander of the scouting party (Ruggles and Doherty, 1890). The mortally wounded Booth was dragged under a tree where he

lingered for about three hours ("President Lincoln," 1865). He died muttering, "Tell my mother I died for my country. I did what I thought to be the best" (Wilson, 1929).

Doherty strapped Booth's body to a board on a dilapidated ambulance with Herold tied and running behind it as the conspirators were returned to Washington. The body of Booth was conveyed by tug up the Potomac and transferred to the Montauk, a ship in the Navy Yard in Washington. The body was rapidly deteriorating from the rough transportation from the Garretts' to Washington and exposure. It was hardly recognizable as John Wilkes Booth, the handsome Bel Aire, Maryland, actor. Stanton called in a number of witnesses to identify the body, but there remained some question in many minds on whether the body was that of John Wilkes Booth. It was deteriorated beyond recognition and quickly and secretly buried. Stanton, however, was certain that the body was Booth's, and he closed the case (Roscoe, 1959).

Here the assassination conspiracy might end. The social misfits David Herold, Lewis Paine, George Atzerodt, and John Surratt's mother, Mrs. Mary Surratt, who was implicated in the conspiracy, were arrested and hanged. Michael O' Laughlin, Edward Spangler, and Samuel Arnold, who were involved in the early stages of the Lincoln conspiracy, and Dr. Mudd received prison sentences. John Surratt escaped, fleeing first to Canada, then to Europe (Bishop, 1955). But the death of John Wilkes Booth was but the beginning of a drama more involved than any play that the young actor had ever starred in in real life.

The original conspiracy involved kidnapping Abraham Lincoln and exchanging him for Southern war prisoners. The plan was born in November, 1864 (Bishop, 1955). While the Confederacy probably did not perpetrate the kidnapping conspiracy, it was aware that such a plan existed. The United States government also knew that a plot against Lincoln was in the works. The Secret Service and the War Department had learned of Booth and the conspiracy from Louis Weichmann, a clerk in the Commissary General of Prisoners Office of the War Department. He lived in Mrs. Mary Surratt's boarding house where Booth and the conspirators held some of their meetings (Eisenschiml, Shadow, 1940).

Although the government knew about the plot, it took no action against them. There had been over eighty threats on the President's life. He was less than a popular man in both the North and the South. A would-be assassin had once even gotten close enough to shoot Lincoln's hat off his head (Roscoe, 1959). Most of the threats against Lincoln had been idle ones, however, and the War Department took no steps to apprehend Booth and the conspirators, perhaps thinking that this was simply another case of crying wolf. It was just as well, for the kidnapping conspiracy against Lincoln provided comic

relief in the tragedy of John Wilkes Booth.

Booth and company -- including Paine, O'Laughlin, Arnold, Atzerodt, Spangler, Surratt, and Herold -- attempted to abduct Abraham Lincoln first on January 18, 1865, at Ford's Theater. Booth planned to drag Lincoln from the theater and transport him South. The kidnapping machinery was primed and ready, but it was an exceptionally stormy night, and the President stayed home (Roscoe, 1959).

The men at Booth's urging tried again on March 20, 1865. Their plan was to stop the Presidential carriage on the road to the Soldiers' Home where Lincoln was to attend a play. Again, Booth had each detail of the plot meticulously planned, but when they stopped the carriage, to their surprise and dismay, they found that Salmon Chase, not Lincoln, was the occupant. Thinking that their plans had been discovered and believing the man in the carriage to be a decoy, they fled, "pursued only by their consciences" (Wilson, 1929). But no one had tried to capture them. The President had remained in Washington to review the 140th Indiana Regiment which presented him with a captured rebel flag (Roscoe, 1959).

Booth's sorry band of would-be kidnappers was a shambles. Spangler, Arnold, and O'Laughlin withdrew from the group. The weak-willed Atzerodt still clung to Booth, though reluctantly. Paine and Herold remained enthusiastic followers of Booth and followed him dog-like into the final stages of the conspiracy -- the assassination (Bishop, 1955).

The assassination plan was a last-minute effort by Booth to save his beloved South. While there was a price on Lincoln's head, Booth seemed to have killed Lincoln for his own personal reasons. He was impassioned by the war which was lost only on the battlefields but not in the minds and hearts of the Southern people. As Brutus thought Caesar, Booth felt that Lincoln would

make himself a king (Laughlin, 1909).

Booth's decision to abort his kidnapping plans and murder Lincoln came in the spring of 1865. While on a visit to the White House, Booth commented to Paine on the simplicity of killing Lincoln, hoping that Paine would take the hint and kill the President then and there. Paine hedged, his instinct for survival stronger than his instinct to kill. The co-conspirator decided he would kill the President but on his own terms. He planned to hide in the bushes outside the White House and wait for Lincoln to return from one of his frequent late meetings at the War Department. The President returned, but Paine's courage failed him again, and he did not shoot the President (Sandburg, 1939).

Booth, frustrated and angry with the failures of kidnapping and assassination plots and anxious about the growing number of Confederate losses, was at his wit's end. Plans were devised; plans were thwarted. Booth soon learned that he could not depend on Paine or anyone else to kill Lincoln. He would have to do it himself. On Tuesday, April 11, 1865, Lincoln addressed the people on the progress of the war effort. Booth was present and sealed the death warrant of the President, proclaiming that the speech would be "the last speech Lincoln will ever make!" (Sandburg, 1939).

Booth felt that every Southerner would be grateful to him for killing Lincoln. "The moment has at last arrived when my plans must be changed," Booth wrote in his diary. "The world may censure me for what I am about to do, but I am sure that posterity will justify me" (Bishop, 1955).

John Wilkes Booth was not an irresponsible maniac but a patriot who wanted to give the South a second chance. But by assassinating Abraham Lincoln, Booth dealt the South the heaviest blow that ever descended upon it (Laughlin, 1909). It is doubtful that the Confederacy sanctioned the

assassination plans. The war was over, and even if Washington leadership were removed, Southern resources were exhausted from four years of fighting. To rid Washington of its leaders would serve no purpose. As Booth fled, he seemed to know that he had turned both North and South against him. He wrote in his diary that "after being hunted like a dog through swamps and woods, wet, cold, and starving, with every man's hand against me, I am here in despair" (Roscoe, 1959). In destroying what he thought was Lincoln's "vaulting ambition," Booth brought about his own destruction.

In 1869, at the request of the Booth family, the body of John Wilkes Booth was reinterred. Taken to the Booth family cemetery, it was laid to rest without a marker as ordered by President Johnson. The body was not positively identified either in 1865 or 1869. There were no formal proceedings to identify the body, no sworn testimony was recorded, and official records were not assembled until several years after the assassination (Eisenschiml, Shadow, 1940).

Many people wondered if John Wilkes Booth really had been killed in 1865. More doubts were raised in the 1870's when John St. Helen, a Southern jack-of-no-trade, confessed that he was John Wilkes Booth. He claimed that he had not been killed in 1865 but had hidden from the Federal troops and escaped. He said that the man killed in the Garrett barn was a Confederate soldier named "Ruddy" or "Robey" ("When Did," 1926).

Finis L. Bates, a young lawyer, befriended St. Helen. They became very close. Once, when St. Helen thought he was dying, he asked his friend Bates to come to his bedside. "I don't believe I shall live," St. Helen told his young friend. "Reach under my pillow and take out a picture you'll find there" (Shepherd, 1924).

Bates took a tintype, a picture of the dying man, from under his pillow.

"If I don't live," he continued, "I want you as my lawyer to send that picture to Edwin Booth in New York City and tell him the man in the picture is dead. And tell him how I died" (Shepherd, 1924).

St. Helen, however, recovered, and shortly afterward he disappeared.

In December, 1902, "John Wilkes Booth" paid a visit to his niece Blanche Booth in El Reno, Oklahoma. Thinking that he was a practical joker, she would not let him in. He left her a note in what appeared to be Booth's handwriting. But she never saw or heard from him again (Johnston, 1938).

In 1903 David E. George, a drug addict and a drunkard, committed suicide in Enid, Oklahoma. When he died having confessed that he was John Wilkes Booth, Finis Bates went to Oklahoma and immediately recognized David George as his old friend John St. Helen, whom he had not seen in twenty-five years (Bates, 1907). George's death in 1903 would have gone unnoticed had it not been for the credibility in his claim that he was John Wilkes booth. The similarities between George (or St. Helen) and Booth were remarkable. George was about sixty-five years old; Booth would have been sixty-five in 1903. George had a scar over his right eye as did John Wilkes Booth. George's right thumb was scarred; Booth's right thumb had been crushed in a stage curtain. Both Booth and George wore size ten boots. George had a scar on his neck; Booth had had an operation to remove a growth from his neck, which left a scar (Snider, 1988). Even their pictures and handwriting specimens were similar (Roscoe, 1959). Not only did George physically resemble Booth and confess that he was the Lincoln assassin, but he was also a would-be actor who entertained Enid, Oklahoma, residents.

And mystery enshrouds the minor characters in the tragedy, too. John F. Parker, Lincoln's bodyguard who was not at his post the night of the assassination, had been in a bar having a drink as Lincoln was shot. Parker,

appointed by Mrs. Lincoln, was only reprimanded for his neglect of duty. Throughout his career on the Washington Metropolitan Police Force he had been in and out of trouble. In 1868 he was dismissed from the force for sleeping in a streetcar while on duty. Then he simply disappeared (Roscoe, 1959).

John Surratt was found in Italy and extradicted to America. He was brought to trial twice. The first trial was deadlocked, the second dismissed when the statute of limitations ran out. He was released and later went on tour giving lectures on the assassination of Lincoln (Bishop, 1955).

Boston Corbett, who claimed to have shot John Wilkes Booth in the Garrett tobacco barn, was a unique character in the conspiracy. Boston was lauded as a hero for killing the man who killed Abraham Lincoln ("The Assassination," 1865). Later he was given a job as a doorman for the Kansas State Legislature. One day he went berserk and opened fire on the Kansas representatives. Luckily, no one was hurt. Boston was committed to an asylum but later escaped. He became a traveling salesman in the Southwest with headquarters in Enid, Oklahoma, the same town where David George died. Then around the turn of the century he dropped from sight (Roscoe, 1959).

The Confederate soldier named "Ruddy" or "Robey," whom St. Helen said was killed in the Garrett tobacco barn, was Franklin A. Robey, the overseer on Samuel Cox's plantation. He was still alive in 1899 (Wilson, 1929).

Unusual circumstances surround almost every character in the conspiracy. Henry Rathbone, who attended the theater with Lincoln, married Clara Harris. Several years after the assassination Rathbone killed his wife and spent the remaining years of his life in an asylum. And Mrs. Lincoln, too, was committed to an asylum ten years after her husband's death. She stayed for one year, then spent the rest of her life in seclusion (Bishop, 1955).

John Wilkes Booth initiated the conspiracy against Abraham Lincoln and

then consummated his plan by murdering the President. Lincoln, however, must be partially blamed for his own death. He ignored the many threats on his life and had an almost fatalistic attitude toward death, exposing himself to danger often. Booth saw the simplicity of kidnapping or killing Lincoln, and only luck and quirks of fate saved Lincoln before April 14, 1865. Had Lincoln not made himself so easily accessible to would-be assassins and kidnappers, Booth might not have persisted in his attempts to either kidnap or kill the President.

Despite Lincoln's attitude, he was unusually anxious on April 14 to have a bodyguard when he went to the theater, this sudden change of heart probably resulting from a dream he had had about his death. Despite Lincoln's concern, Secretary of War Stanton, whose duty it was to protect the President, refused to give him adequate protection (Eisenschiml, Why, 1937). Stanton may not have arranged for Lincoln's death, but he may have permitted it. Certainly he was capable, and with Lincoln out of the way, Stanton could impose his own Reconstruction plan on the South without conflict from the President.

Stanton controlled all aspects of the capture and trial of the conspirators from his office. The search for Booth and his accomplices was poorly effected. Facts concerning the murder were veiled in secrecy by official and unofficial censorship. Some records were destroyed, and others were not assembled until many years after events took place. Perhaps censorship was necessary because of the delicacy of the war. And perhaps officials did not want to make Booth appear to be a martyr. Or perhaps men just did not think clearly in the passion of events surrounding the murder. But still, the guiding hand of Stanton seems to be everywhere, muddying the waters for future historians.

Paine, Herold, Atzerodt, and Mrs. Surratt were the primary scapegoats,

along with O'Laughlin, Mudd, and Spangler, who were punished for Lincoln's death. They were cruelly treated as they awaited trial, hooded, chained, and severely interrogated. Stanton seemed to carry out his own personal vendetta against the conspirators.

The trial itself was a mockery, taking place while the passions surrounding Lincoln's death were still high. No one was allowed to communicate with the prisoners except on order of both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy. The trial began on May 9, 1865. They were found guilty on July 6, and the next day Paine, Herold, Atzerodt, and Mrs. Surratt were hanged. Two hundred sixty-five witnesses testified for or against the prisoners, but they were never allowed to utter a word in their own defense (Laughlin, 1909). Stanton saw to that.

Why Booth chose the misfits is a mystery in itself. Surely he did not expect one hundred percent success with his sorry band. Perhaps he planned for some to be captured and punished for the conspiracy. The government would probably be satisfied as long as it had someone to answer for Lincoln's murder. Booth even tried to make the government believe that Andrew Johnson was part of the conspiracy by leaving a note for the Vice-President in his mailbox (Roscoe, 1959).

The premeditated concealing of events of the conspiracy lends credibility to stories of the reincarnation of Booth in the form of St. Helen or David George. But they were imposters. Booth may have committed suicide in 1865 in the tradition of the Shakespearean hero. Or he may have been shot to keep him from implicating the United States' government officials who were involved in the conspiracy. The stories of George and St. Helen, however, demonstrated that his memory was still very much alive.

There are many aspects of the Lincoln conspiracy, and unlike the

Shakespearean tragedy that Booth wanted to make the murder, Lincoln's death did not restore order to the universe outside the microcosm of the theater in Washington. Each aspect of the story seems to open a whole tragedy of disorder in itself. There are so many coincidences, so many quirks of fate -- disappearing people, key people showing up in the same places years after the event, people cruelly silenced, and vital information destroyed. In the incredible tragedy, Booth killed Abraham Lincoln and played his part well, but behind the scenes someone else directed the greatest crime -- and perhaps the greatest irony -- in American history.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SPECIAL PROJECT IN SOCIAL STUDIES

"JOHN WILKES BOOTH AND THE LINCOLN CONSPIRACY"

INTRODUCTION: On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln in Ford's Theater in Washington, D. C. Your American history textbook includes only a brief reference to this important historical event. The following research and accompanying assignments have been prepared to provide you, the student, with a more thorough understanding of the plot to kill the sixteenth president as well as the kidnapping plans that preceded it and the events that followed it.

DIRECTIONS: Read the essay "John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracy." Then select assignments from the following list which add up to the grade you wish to receive (up to 100 maximum). On a title page provided, write the assignments chosen (with point totals) and objectives. You may work alone or in groups of two or three. Acceptance of completed assignments will be determined by neatness, organization, creativity, style, and accuracy. Include your name on all projects, and be prepared to display and discuss them in class. Deadline for submission of assignments will be announced. (Note: Point totals may be adjusted to reflect quality and quantity of specific assignments).

10 Make a wordfind of twenty persons or places from the research. Include a brief description of the person or place along with the name plus the key.

10 Make a crossword puzzle of at least twenty persons or places from the research. Include the key.

10 Select twenty vocabulary words from the research. Write the word, its part of speech, and its definition.

15 As a Northerner, write a letter to a friend explaining your feelings after the assassination of Lincoln.

15 As a Southerner, write a letter to a friend explaining your feelings after the assassination of Lincoln.

20 Present a three-five minute oral report on a topic based on the research.

20 Draw a map showing Booth's escape route from Washington, D. C. Begin at Ford's Theater and end at the Garrett tobacco barn. (It will be necessary to use supplemental material to complete this assignment).

25 Write a 150-200 word biography of one of the persons from the research. (It will be necessary to use supplemental material to complete this assignment).

25 Write an annotated bibliography of five books from the bibliography.

25 Write five days of diary entries (100-150 words per entry) as one of the persons from the research. Be specific, write in first person, and date each entry. (They do not need to be dated consecutively).

25 Read onto an audio tape an abridged version of the research.

35 Make a geneology chart of John Wilkes Booth's family. (It will be necessary to use supplemental research to complete this assignment).

35 Prepare and present an original game which uses the research as the basis for questions and answers. Include the rules and game board (if used) for the game.

35 Role-play one of the persons from the research and participate in an interview on a radio or TV talk show.

40 Select three persons from the research. Role-play to conduct a two-three minute interview on audio tape for each person as if he/she were in the news today. Include the questions asked to each person.

50 Select one of the books from the bibliography and write a four to five page book report.

50 Read three editorials from the New York Times or other newspaper written before April 14, 1865. Summarize the editorials in essays of 300-400 words each.

50 Read three editorials from the New York Times or other newspaper written after April 14, 1865. Summarize the editorials in essays of 300-400 words each.

50 Construct a model of Ford's Theater.

75 Write your own newspaper using persons and events from the research as the basis for news stories, editorials, letters to the editor, cartoons, obituaries, etc.

75 Using supplemental references, design clothes and attire dolls in outfits worn by persons in the research.

75 Using the events from the research, write the script for a radio news show and read it onto an audio tape as if the events were occurring today.

75 Convert the research or a segment of it into a play. Follow the style for writing plays: include stage directions, avoid shifting settings which would be difficult to stage, include brief character descriptions, etc.

95 Using the events from the research, write the script for a television news show and present it before a videotape camera as if the events were occurring today. Create maps, charts, and other necessary visual aids.

95 Conduct the trial of John Wilkes Booth as if he had survived in 1865.

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APPENDIX B

SPECIAL PROJECT IN SOCIAL STUDIES

"JOHN WILKES BOOTH AND THE LINCOLN CONSPIRACY"

Name_____

Contracted Grade_____

Teacher Approval_____

Date Due_____

List Specific Assignments (Include Point Totals)

1.____ _____

2.____ _____

3.____ _____

4.____ _____

5.____ _____

____ Point Totals

Objectives

_____

_____

_____

Attach a Bibliography

I agree to complete the above assignments to the best of my ability and to submit the completed assignments on the date (s) that they are due.

_____
Student Signature